*LUTHER'S TRANSLATIONS ARE BURNED*

[Martin Luther](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/martin-luther_1), a Catholic monk, thought the Church had gone too far when it required people to buy indulgences - a kind of financial transaction to absolve sins. Luther was especially upset with [Johann Tetzel](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/johann-tetzel), a Dominican monk, who told folks they could get their deceased friends out of purgatory if they only dropped [money](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/tetzel-collecting-money-) into Tetzel's [indulgence box](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/indulgence-box).

Remorse for sins - not coins dropping into a money box - was Luther's interpretation of the Bible. He thought it was wrong for people to think they could "[buy](http://www.luther.de/en/moench.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22r%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)" their way to salvation. He believed the Pope wanted people to buy Indulgences to profit the Church (and build St. Peter's in Rome), not to save the souls of the buyers. He said so publicly in his list of "[95 Theses](http://www.gty.org/~phil/history/95theses.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)."

Not content to merely write up the abuses, Luther tacked them to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany for all to see. The Diet (governing council) was convened in Worms to judge Luther. At that "trial" Luther refused to recant and uttered his famous (probably apocryphal) words: "[Here I stand](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/luther-before-the-council); I can do no other." Those actions started the Protestant Reformation.

Saved from the stake by the help of the German ruler, [Frederick the Wise](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/frederick-the-wise), Luther had to hide from ecclesiastical authorities. Frederick put him up in the Castle of the Wartburg. During that time, using Tyndale's manuscripts, [Luther](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/martin-luther-2) translated the new Testament into German and ultimately translated the entire [Bible](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/luthers-german-bible).

[Luther's Bible](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/luthers-german-bible-printed-on-a-gutenberg-press) was the first book published for mass circulation on the Gutenberg press in the nearby city of Mainz. But Luther's Bible, like so many vernacular translations before it, fell victim to the Pope's decrees and was burned in 1624.

Luther's books were exquisitely illustrated, like this [prayer book](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/prayer-book-written-by-martin-luther), and his [hymns](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/luther-hymn-book) are still sung today. (This German original of "A Mighty Fortress is our God" is just one example). Here is a link to a beautiful page of [Luther's 1582 Bible](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/luthers-1582-bible-selected-page) depicting Joshua praying for the people's courage and protection.

Even though Luther's Bibles were ordered to be burned, the new invention - Gutenberg's printing press - made destruction of all Luther's translations very difficult. When books were no longer copied by hand, there were thousands more to destroy. Gutenberg's invention had changed everything.

*THE PRINTING PRESS*

Johannes Gutenberg had also published a Bible - the first book ever [printed](http://www.imultimedia.pt/museuvirtpress/ing/hist/1300/1300.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) with[movable type](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/gutenbergs-printing-press) in the Western World - on his [printing press](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/gutenberg-at-work-in-his-shop).

Gutenberg's heavily illustrated Bible was both beautiful and expensive.  It cost about three year's pay for an average clerk.

[Gutenberg's achievement](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/gutenberg-working) changed the world.  As Michael Inman, the curator of rare books at New York Public Library, [puts it](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-new-york-public-library/a-question-of-biblical-pr_b_699417.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank):

***The mass printing of identical texts, which hadn't really been possible before Gutenberg, greatly facilitated the spread of knowledge. Over a period of several hundred years, language - spelling and grammar - was gradually codified. Literacy rates went up. More and more people were reading the same texts and discussing or debating the same ideas. This improvement in communication was one of the most important outcomes of printing.***

The [Gutenberg Bible](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/gutenberg-bible_1) was not burned because it was printed in Latin, not in the vernacular (everyday language of people).

Book burning was not unique to Europe during the Middle Ages. As missionaries ventured to the "New World," they exported theological correctness. Their zeal in converting others helped to destroy important aspects of ancient cultures - like the Mayans.

*CENSORSHIP CONTINUES*

With the end of the Middle Ages, uncontrolled book burning ceased, but attempts to thwart people from developing new ideas - and writing about them - continued. [John Milton](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/john-milton), the famous English poet and [author](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/note/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) of [Paradise Lost](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/paradise-lost-by-john-milton), gave an impassioned speech to the British Parliament in 1644, urging freedom of expression:

***...(W)ho kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself.***

Milton's words were themselves condemned by Parliament. So was the book that contained them: [Areopagitica](http://www.awesomestories.com/assets/areopagitica-by-john-milton).